

VZCZCXRO7268
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #0064/01 0150540
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 150540Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8463
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU//TCH//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEUITH/TLO ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/TSR ANKARA TU
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000064

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OSCE](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ERGENEKON INVESTIGATION EMBEDDED IN TURKEY'S
POLITICAL THICKET

REF: A. ANKARA 31
[1](#)B. ANKARA 25

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: The rapidly widening scope and pace of the Ergenekon investigation (ref A) has been accompanied by an equally sharp rise in heated political rhetoric. PM Erdogan, on January 13, defended the investigation and accused its main critic, opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal, of "defending the mafia and organized crime." Baykal retorted by accusing Erdogan of manipulating the investigation, which he called "chaotic" and likened to Hitler's efforts to sideline communists following the 1933 Reichstag fire. Loath to miss an opportunity to attack Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the lead up to critical March local elections, opposition Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli suggested AKP is using the case as a means of revenge against its political opponents. Although it is unlikely any politician at this stage has a solid understanding of how the complex and confusing Ergenekon investigation will pan out, opposition parties will continue to criticize AKP's approach at every opportunity, as the recent criticism of AKP's handling of the Gaza crisis demonstrates (ref B). In a political environment where polls show that a large and growing swath of undecided voters are becoming disillusioned with government performance, opposition parties will continue to ratchet up pressure on AKP. Although there are indications the Ergenekon case is unlikely to sway individual voters, no party can afford to let the others get the moral high ground on the case lest it does become an election issue. End summary and comment.

Ergenekon Investigation Widens

[1](#)2. (U) All media outlets continue to give extensive coverage to the Ergenekon investigation. Media reported that over the January 10-11 weekend, police used a map, confiscated during a search of Ergenekon suspect Ibrahim Sahin's house in Ankara, to uncover a hidden weapons cache that included two light anti-tank weapons, one grenade, 300 bullets and 700 grams of plastic explosives. Prosecutors formally charged Sahin, the former Acting Head of the Special Operations Department of the Turkish National Police (TNP), and eight others following the raids that occurred the week of January 5 (ref A). Meanwhile, nine of those detained in the raids were released, including retired generals Tuncay Kilinc and

Kemal Yavuz, and former Higher Education Council (YOK) President Kemal Guruz. On January 11, police displayed the latest seized cache to the press. According to mainstream Turkish press, files seized in connection with Sahin's arrest reveal that Sahin had set up teams to assassinate prominent Alevi leaders in order to create sectarian tension prior to March 29 local elections. "Sabah" reported that seized documents revealed a plan to use car bombs to attack six Ankara shopping malls. "Hurriyet" reported that Ergenekon suspects had compiled personal information about top judicial and state officials such as the PM, FM, MOI, and Parliament Speaker. On January 14, Vural Ergul, attorney for one of the suspects, filed a criminal complaint with the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors against the three Ergenekon prosecutors, alleging that they are using "illegal" and "fabricated" evidence against the suspects.

AKP: Let Justice Do Its Duty

¶3. (U) Addressing his parliamentary group on January 13, PM Erdogan defended the investigation and accused Baykal, a critic of the investigation, of "defending the mafia and organized crime." Erdogan told his AKP troops that the continuing investigation had helped foil "bloody plans for massacre." Drawing attention to the recent discovery of several grenades and weapons caches, he said, "Those who are involved and who support the conspiracy will be punished regardless of their positions." Erdogan saluted the police and Jandarma for their courage in advancing the

ANKARA 00000064 002 OF 003

investigation, which he noted was "just a beginning." Erdogan questioned Baykal's motives, stating, "At times Baykal defends fighting against the mafia and Gladio, but at times he advocates for them. What are you afraid of? Why are you in such a panic? You may have some sentimental ties with some of those involved in the case. Turkey's prosecutors will do their job and declare their innocence if they are indeed innocent. Do not try to put pressure on the courts and influence the law." Erdogan stated at a separate event on January 11 that "institutions were not bound by the mistakes of its individuals," a statement that has been interpreted by the media as showing deference to the military as an institution in light of the arrests of both retired and active duty military officers in connection with the investigation.

¶4. (C) AKP Deputy Group Chair Sadullah Ergin told us January 13 that CHP's claims that AKP was controlling the investigation and using it to achieve its political ends were "ludicrous." According to Ergin, the current discoveries were just the latest result of several years of detailed, diligent investigation by intelligence units and prosecutors into credible claims of coup plots. Ergin said he was "horrified" that anyone would allege that the threats uncovered during the investigation were not "very real", in the wake of a long line of murders that appeared to be the acts of "deep state" groups instead of mere individuals, including the murder of Catholic Priest Santoro in Trabzon, the Malatya murders of three Christians, the murder of Hrant Dink, and the attack on the Supreme Court of Appeals (Danistay). The recent detentions and weapons seizures were all that prevented further such incidents, including the planned murder of prominent Alevis.

Military Cautious, Respectful

¶5. (SBU) The military, for its part, is cautious but respectful of the investigation. According to a January 9 report in "Yeni Safak," a newspaper considered close to AKP, during a meeting with PM Erdogan following the arrests, Basbug expressed his support for the judicial process, but

aired his discomfort with some of the details of how the case is unfolding. He agreed that those guilty of committing crimes should be punished, but urged that those deemed innocent not be held "for a long period" of time. He also expressed discomfort with the arrest of retired generals, asking that members of the Armed Forces be invited to testify rather than be placed into custody. (Comment: While we have not been able to confirm the veracity of the media report, the message attributed to Basbug is consistent with what contacts tell us is Basbug's approach: a preference to work out issues with the government in private rather than through the media, and being respectful to civilian authorities even when there are differences in view and ideology. The retired generals' release so soon after Basbug's meeting with Erdogan appears to signal the government's willingness to respond to the military's concerns. End comment.)

¶16. (SBU) The newspaper also reported that Basbug asked that retired generals currently in prison be released as they await their trial, and suggested that means other than imprisonment be employed to prevent them from leaving the country. The media also report that Basbug asked senior commanders to review files of active duty officers implicated in the investigations, investigate leaks attributed to the TGS and improve information security practices at TGS, and ensure that weapons belonging to the military are secured and accounted for.

Opposition: Investigation Not To Be Trusted

¶17. (U) In his January 13 party group meeting, Baykal responded to the PM's remarks, saying Erdogan was not in a position to criticize CHP. Baykal suggested Erdogan had tampered with the investigation and was using it to achieve political ends. Baykal noted that following the recent detentions Erdogan and President Gul met with TGS Chief Ilker

ANKARA 00000064 003 OF 003

Basbug. Three days later, three retired generals and a former Higher Education Council (YOK) President were released from detention. Of this chain of events, Baykal said, "What might have happened in those three days? If there was sufficiently strong evidence to justify the detentions, the suspects should not have been released. This is a political case."

¶18. (U) Baykal also said the widening scope of the investigation based on the 2,500-page indictment had resulted in "chaos." After likening the investigation to the tactics used by Hitler following the 1933 Reichstag fire to sideline communists, Baykal asked, "Is it not a manipulation project?" Responding to Erdogan's prior claim that CHP had been "infected by the Ergenekon virus," Baykal said, "I recommend you not meddle in our party's affairs."

¶19. (U) Speaking to his party's parliamentary group, Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahceli suggested that AKP was attempting to manipulate the investigation as a means of revenge. Bahceli stressed the importance of ensuring fair trails in the Ergenekon investigation, stating, "the legal process should not be manipulated for political goals." Bahceli warned against "those who plan to sweep to power via undemocratic means," and said that "the future of the rule of law will darken if the revenge cries do not end."

Will Voters Be Swayed?

¶10. (C) Political analyst Orhan Kaya told us that it is difficult to predict whether the Ergenekon investigation will sway voters when they vote in March 29 local elections. Kaya said that voters' views seem to fall in line with the party

the person supports: AKP backers believe the investigation is a courageous effort to uncover vile criminal acts and root out elements of a "deep state" that nearly all Turks firmly believe exists; AKP opponents believe investigators have overreached to the point where the case has turned into a political fight instead of a search for truth and justice. Most of the large number of undecided voters (Note: an October A and G poll found that 31 percent of voters remain undecided; a November Metropoll put the figure at 20 percent.) do not yet view the investigation as political, and continue to support the investigation, according to Kaya. He cited a GENAR poll published on November 10, in which 67.9 percent of respondents agreed with the indictment language that called the group a "terrorist organization," while 32.1 percent disagreed. (Comment and note: The GENAR poll is two months old and does not reflect dramatic developments such as the arrest and release of several prominent figures and the arms caches discovered in excavations around the country. An ongoing unscientific "CNN Turk" online poll that asks whether the detentions are motivated by "vengeance." Out of 779 respondents, 442 (57 percent) answered "No," and 337 (43 percent) said "Yes.") Kaya believes that this view will quickly change if the next round of sweeps results in politicians being detained, which he believes will destroy the credibility of the investigation in voters' eyes.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
[http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turk ey](http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turk%20ey)

Jeffrey